



H.R. 997 Myths and Reality

In the debate about making English the official language of the United States, opponents of the law have issued many predictions of dire consequences, should the bill become law. These predictions, however, are easily refuted by referencing H.R. 997's text, as all as the experience of the 31 states that currently have some form of an Official English law.

Myth #1: H.R. 997 would interfere with government efforts to disseminate information in emergencies such as a natural disaster or terrorist attack.

Reality: Chapter 6, Sec. 163 (c)(3) and (4) make clear that the general English requirements of H.R. 997 do *not* apply to "actions, documents, or policies necessary for national security, international relations, trade, tourism, or commerce" and "actions or documents that protect the public health and safety." Government agencies do not currently issue warnings and health information in all 320+ languages spoken in the United States; however, H.R. 997 will not in any way limit the flexibility that exists under the status quo.

Myth #2: H.R. 997 would interfere with state and federal efforts to assist children not yet proficient in English.

Reality: Chapter 6, Sec. 163 (c)(1) makes clear that the general English requirements of H.R. 997 do *not* apply to "teaching of languages." H.R. 997 leaves undisturbed the state and federal laws dealing with assisting children who are English language learners.

Myth #3: H.R. 997 is based on the fallacy that the English language is under some sort of 'threat.'

Reality: None of the significant groups that support Official English (including U.S. English) advance the claim that the language is being threatened. Our concern is that the abundance of well-meaning efforts to assist newcomers have to some degree taken away many of the natural incentives to learn English. According to the 2010 Census, more than 25 million Americans can speak English less than 'very well,' a category indicating they likely do not have basic conversational skills in English.

Myth #4: Official English laws are a throwback to anti-immigrant legislation of the past, and they show hostility to immigrants.

Reality: There is nothing anti-immigrant about Official English laws. A June 2005 Zogby poll found that 81 percent of first- and second-generation Americans support making English the official language of the United States, a higher percentage of support than was found among overall respondents. The vast majority of immigrants find no issue with Official English laws.

Myth #5: Official English laws are unconstitutional, under the Supreme Court precedent of *Meyer v. Nebraska*.

Reality: *Meyer* is a 1923 case in which the Supreme Court struck down a Nebraska statute that forbade the teaching of foreign languages to young, school-aged children—even in private schools. The law was an unconstitutional infringement upon parents' right to direct the raising of their children, and bears absolutely no resemblance to the Official English Laws being debated today. Tellingly, in litigation over state Official English laws, opponents of these laws have never cited *Meyer v. Nebraska* as helpful to their argument. *Meyer* is an important case in constitutional law, but it is absolutely irrelevant in analyzing the constitutionality of Official English laws.